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ABSTRACT

Students' last years in high school which otherwise might be ones in which they enjoy the privileges of their seniority can become a nightmare of waiting, fear of rejection, despair, and desperation for many college-bound students. The whole structure of college admissions is hopelessly archaic, exorbitantly wasteful and one which systematically demoralizes the successive classes of students who must scuttle through its awesome gauntlet on their way to their adult destinies. Reform is long overdue. The motive of charging what the market will bear guides university and college administrators just as much as it does their corporate counterparts. Other countries have central admissions procedures in which students and colleges are matched by interest and ability. College admissions procedures in the United States have very low cost-effectiveness due to the fact that only a fraction of the pool is qualified and only a fraction of the qualified are interested in enrolling. Freedom from control more than any other factor insures the supposed superiority of private education over other kinds. The College Board and its test development subcontractor, Educational Testing Service, are powerful, prestigious, and wealthy organizations that support policies that tighten their dominance and reinforce their job security. Private, elite colleges, the federal government, and parents are unlikely to take the lead in organizing centralized admissions. School counselors are beginning to complain about the evils of the current admissions procedures. They are organizing to see that students' needs for more practical application arrangements are better served. (ABL)

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WRONGS OF PASSAGE:

The Scandal of College Admissions

by Dan Tyson

Joe Marsh was worried about his future. No matter that he was an "A" student, a varsity fullback, the coordinator of his school's peer counseling program and the features editor for the school newspaper. His worries had begun last May when his school counselor told him in the course of his initial college planning interview that "'Safeties' aren't 'safeties' anymore. You'll have to apply to at least twenty colleges."

Now it was early December. Application deadlines were approaching. Last summer he had visited the campuses of most of the colleges on his list. He had talked to a number of admissions officers during their recruiting visits to his school in the fall. He had gone to a college fair. He had met local alumni representatives of several colleges. Privately he had determined that Wesleyan was his first choice. Pretending that the other nineteen were equally attractive to him was tough, but he'd tried hard to appear sincerely enthusiastic in every contact that he made. After numerous trial drafts, Joe still wasn't satisfied with his personal essay. Pretending wasn't Joe's cup of tea. Somehow he just didn't feel right about creating a phony self and writing it down time after time, slightly altered, for college after college.

As Joe was discovering that candor will get you nowhere in getting into college, tens of thousands of Joe's peers were being confronted with exactly

the same problems that disturbed him. They, too, were trying to seem equally interested in the fifteen or twenty colleges they believed they had to apply to in order to secure an acceptable college option. Each year in America the households that include aspirants to selective colleges go through agonies of anxiety and frustration as they try to find their ways through the fantasies and myths which obscure the realities of choosing a college. Each year they worry from September - when the complex process of deciding about college applications begins - until mid-April when they receive the college decisions. All of them learn something about the instrumental value of being a little phony in declaring their preferences. All of them learn to rein in their impulses to commitment and openness as they apply to a number of colleges with apparent sincerity. In return they are bombarded with slick sales promotions by the colleges designed both to heighten their interest and to keep them in suspense about the outcome. Few go through this tortured passage with their ideals intact and the psychic toll is incalculable. Joe Marsh eventually succeeded with his application to Wesleyan. The prolonged, worrisome charade of lining up alternative options, however, sapped his zest for the whole procedure. Joe was comparatively fortunate. One of my students once became so depressed after the long awaited college decisions arrived that he took his own life, one afternoon in May, in the dormitory room of his boarding school.

The students' last years in high school which might otherwise be ones in which they enjoy the privileges of their seniority become a nightmare of waiting, fear of rejection, despair and desperation. For thirty years as an admissions director and a school counselor, I have colluded with increasing revulsion in this annual injustice to our young people. Having fought in vain with my professional colleagues to rationalize the application process for the relief of these student victims, I am compelled to denounce the whole structure of college

admissions as hopelessly archaic, exorbitantly wasteful and one which systematically demoralizes the successive classes of students who must scuttle through its awesome gauntlet on their ways to their adult destinies. Reform is long overdue.

The scandal of admissions is only a reflection of the identity crisis endemic to American universities. They seem not really sure whether they are seasonal Theme Parks, Farm Clubs, Group Therapy, or simply Holding Tanks for youngsters too rambunctious to remain at home and not yet seasoned enough in the ways of the world to be allowed adult responsibilities - or some combination of the above with job training thrown in. It is useful for the consumer of higher educational services to see colleges and universities as big businesses selling a product. The trick is to try to get your money's worth and it is not as easy as it might be.

We generally avoid describing higher education in marketplace terms. Yet the fact that every year for the past five, colleges and universities have increased their prices at double the annual inflation rates, (in 1988 cost increases averaged 8% over 1987) suggests that the motive of charging what the market will bear guides university administrators just as it surely as it does their corporate counterparts. And the market does bear exorbitant costs which now hover around \$20,000 annually at the most expensive private colleges. Even though the numbers of graduating high school seniors are declining, applications at prestigious colleges and universities in this same period have been increasing. Most of these increases are to be explained by the fact that over stimulated and under-counseled students are each applying to more selective colleges. Now, as everyone knows, to enter the court of the bitch goddess, Success, requires first a passage through the courtyards of the elite universities. The queues at those portals are getting longer and longer.

American education does have its critics, but few of them have trained their sights on the awkward process of applying to selective colleges. Sheltered from serious criticism, the college admissions fraternity (although women now direct admissions at high-status Stanford, Cornell and a few other prestigious universities) perpetuates practices that belong to the Edwardian Age.

Actually, it should be almost as convenient for a student to book space in a desired university or college program as it is for a traveler to book a flight on American Airlines or a theatergoer to reserve a seat for a Broadway show. In each case a customer with a need or a wish is buying a service to fulfill it. The difference is simply one of degree. Ordinarily, shoppers have to meet only one qualification: they must have the money or the credit to make the purchase. Once credit is established the reservation is confirmed and both buyer and supplier can relax in the afterglow of a done deal.

By contrast the college shopper has to show that in addition to money, he or she has enough brains, personality and peculiar talents to deserve a place in a particular college before the deal can be struck. Admittedly, deciding how much is "enough" of brains, personality and talent is a more complex process than checking a credit rating. It involves, however, the same kind of procedure - the evaluation of documents - whether it is verifying a credit card or a statement of net worth, or authenticating a transcript of grades earned at school, or interpreting test scores, or rating talent reports and personal recommendations. If this is all there is to college admissions, why make it so complicated? This is the key question and one which ought to be put sharply and often to the U. S. admissions establishment which could be doing more to keep America competitive with the best of international educational practice.

That best of admissions practice probably occurs in Ireland where there is a

Central Application Office (CAO) to which every Irish student (about 24,000 annually) wishing to enroll in any of the nine universities in Ireland submits one simple application form indicating the academic course intended and a rank--ordered preference for the universities which offer the preferred course of study. In July, when the results of school leaving examinations are delivered by electronic mail the CAO runs a sophisticated computer matching program which assigns each applicant to his or her highest choice university at which space remains. Assignments go to students in order of their merit and if no more openings exist in a program of the student's first choice, admission to the next choice university is offered. The results are published in national newspapers on a certain summer date and all the admissions deals are done. The application costs about \$20 and the CAO operates in the black without requiring subsidies from the universities or the government.

The irony here is that the secretary and chief executive officer of the Irish CAO, Dr. Martin Newell, is a computer engineer who earned his doctorate at the University of Indiana. If only America applied its own technology so effectively in behalf of its college-bound students as does Ireland. American admissions officers do use computers, of course, but they use them competitively rather than cooperatively. They seem more concerned about programming word processors to generate automated, pseudo-personalized letters for the competitive sales campaign than exploiting the computer's superb capacities for analyzing massive amounts of information, reviewing options, and solving problems. Little Ireland manages its aggregate admissions task with a Digital VAX 11/750. Perhaps it would take a Cray super-computer to match nearly a million college-bound Americans appropriately to America's several thousand colleges. Diverting a day of a Cray's time normally spent on such urgent tasks as planning the next Stars War's scenario, to such a practical matter as giving every college and every

aspirant the best possible admissions match, might have great political appeal.

A larger but very effective centralized application system worthy of emulation is that of the United Kingdom. Some thirty years ago, the universities in the United Kingdom recognized that by cooperating in a central admissions scheme they might deploy their resources better in serving students than if each persisted independently with differing programmes. The result is the University Central Council on Admissions (UCCA). This has worked so well that now that another organization, Polytechnic Central Admissions Systems (PCAS) facilitates admissions to UK polytechnic institutes.

The UCCA system is interesting because it accommodates the most highly selective universities, Cambridge and Oxford, as well as the newer universities with less tradition and lower status. Although in principle students are free to make whatever rank-ordered choices they wish, in practice well-advised students will not list either Cambridge or Oxford as anything but their first choice.

Alma Mater is a jealous mother in England as well as in the U. S. Cambridge and Oxford each have an ample supply of well qualified first choice aspirants in their candidate pools and it would be unreasonable to expect them to pass over these eager, qualified applicants to admit a candidate whose stated first preference was for another university.

University systems in Germany, Australia, and the province of Ontario in Canada have central admissions offices. The huge multiple-campus state university system of California has adopted a single application system which efficiently serves its own applicants, but excludes service to the state's other private colleges and universities.

These tidy, cooperative single application systems contrast markedly with

the competitive multiple application practice that prevails in the U.S. Here each university requires its unique application form and an application fee from each student. It is common for students to apply to at least five colleges and not uncommon for them to apply to fifteen or more. For the past several years, the selective colleges have attracted ever higher rates of application not because more real students are seeking admission but because more of the same students are multiplying their applications to the same set of selective colleges. Consequently, even the selective colleges are having to admit more students for the same number of openings in expectation of a lower yield.

The consequences of multiple college applications are multiple, malevolent and, as the experience of Ireland and the United Kingdom shows, unnecessary. A critical analysis of U. S. admissions procedures calls for a brief review of their effects on the colleges, the high schools and upon the candidates themselves.

Multiple applications require that college admissions offices gear up at great expense to create and then cultivate a bloated applicant pool. They treat each application with care - even though they know that much of the work is fruitless because only a fraction of the pool is qualified and only a fraction of the qualified are really interested in enrolling and will only do so in default of a preferred option. As a result, the cost-effectiveness of any university admissions operations is very, very low. Years ago, I was a director of admissions at a small mid-western college and innocently thought it would be a good idea to report an admissions cost per new student enrolled. When I divided the admissions budget by the number of new students that year, the cost of recruiting each student averaged \$1,000. Tuition then was only \$4,000 per year. I decided not to send up this report to the president.

The admissions profession, like other professions, is a vested interest. The people in it need to make the admissions process complex so that it provides secure employment for a large number of experienced professionals. Admissions officers do in fact work hard and conscientiously at their tasks. They do not "featherbed". They simply have designed admissions procedures with enough complexity so that there will always be an atmosphere of frenzy in the office. If the comptroller drops by he will see bushels of mail to be responded to and banks of dossiers to be read, phones ringing, computers humming, printers spewing out sorts and lists and analyses. He will see a busy staff and he will be reassured that the admissions operation deserves the inordinate share of the institution's budget dollar that it commands. Multiple applications are the fuel that drives this bloated industry. One can only laugh at the cause of this frenzy and this expense. All of these admissions offices are considering the admission of the same set of students who have multi-applied to them.

Higher educational institutions by tradition are exempted from the clamor for economy with which the public presses its local schools. Academic freedom for university faculties tends to spill over into administrative affairs. In the elite private universities, the admissions operation is a sort of sacred cow. It is very easy for an admissions director to point to his increasing mail count to justify an increased budget even though the target figure for enrollment remains static. The admissions statistics are the ultimate gauge of a university's public image. Even though the so-called "flagship universities" - the Ivies, M.I. T., Stanford and the great public universities with their tremendous research facilities - have the resources, the traditions, and the reputations to assure their continued predominance, they compete fiercely with one another for the best students. At its best this competition means an improvement in educational services to students. On another level the competition may take the form

of seeming to provide more amenities. Acres of well-tended greensward and neat Georgian architecture seem to sell well. In any event this competition for students takes money - lots of it - and it drives up the cost of college more rapidly, I judge, than it improves the intrinsic quality of higher education qua education.

If the competitive admissions pressures on universities are severe, the effects of the multiple application system on secondary schools are devastating. The application forms of selective colleges typically require recommendations from a counselor and two teachers. Often the form specifies that the teacher be an English teacher. Assume that this teacher is teaching two sections of senior English. He, or more likely, she, will have requests from sixty students for an average of five recommendations each. The teachers are seldom given reduced teaching loads or clerical assistance to deal with those 300 forms which require their professional attention. What a way for an English teacher to spend the Christmas holiday. No wonder the best and brightest and most conscientious of our schools' teachers burn out at an early age.

The selective college application procedure calls for the school to prepare, verify and mail at least two transcripts for each applicant. One is sent to meet a January deadline. The second one requires that the student's 7th term marks appear and it must be sent just as soon after the close of the fall term as possible - usually by February 15 at the latest. Then for those who are enrolling there is a third and final transcript required after the student has graduated. A recent complexity has been introduced by a policy of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) which requires the Athletic Directors of member institutions to have on file the academic credentials of any college freshman who may be engaged in any varsity sport. So, not only does the school

counselor's office have to send academic credentials twice for each applicant to the university admissions office, but a third time for each enrolling candidate and a fourth time to the Athletic Director's Office. That's a lot of paperwork, particularly when so much of it has to do with "ghost" applicants - those who appear in five or more college application pools, but who ultimately can appear on only one campus.

School counselors, like college admissions officers, accept the multiple application non-system as a sort of ever-flowing udder to be mulched for all the status and job security that can come from its complex pressures. "Kids' futures are at stake", the counselor will state. No responsible school board can be casual about "kids' futures". Schools serving middle-class families are pressured successfully to deploy enough resources toward college guidance to assure that these multiple application multi-documents are adequately processed in time to meet the deadlines.

Professional adults, of course, are better able to cope with the effects of irrational application procedures than are the candidates themselves. The adults exploit the system for what it can give them in employment security and status. It is the students and their families who are ravaged by the costs and pressures of this thoughtless system. First of all there is the expense of applying to a number of colleges at \$25 to \$50 per application. More seriously there is the mendacity resulting from the requirement that the candidate pretend that each college is a "first choice." Not to do so is to diminish the chances of being accepted. Mendacity learned in the application process surely carries over into a tolerance for fraudulent behavior in college and beyond. It is not the underprivileged school dropouts that organize corrupt procurement practices at the Pentagon or indulge in illegal insider trading on Wall street or fake data in

scientific research reports or head a baby food corporation that deliberately distributes fake apple juice to a really innocent class of consumers. It is the college graduate who learned the utility of mendacity along with other truths in the pursuit of his educational career.

The effect of this cumbersome admission structure on students who are trying to make critical choices is pernicious. The application history of one of my students, Bill Chance, illustrates how planning seems to become futile and fantasy a refuge for the confused. Bill identified some applied art programs at British Universities that were of interest to him. He applied to five universities in England through the central UCCA office by completing one form and paying one fee of about \$10. The UCCA form does not involve teacher recommendations. The student completes his part of the form, gives it to the counselor who acts as a referee to verify the accuracy of the student's report of courses completed and participation in activities. The referee makes a summary statement describing the student's academic and other achievements on this form and sends it on to the UCCA office by October 15. The universities responded to Bill within a few months. He received three rejections but two of his choices gave him conditional offers of admissions. The conditions were that he achieve specified marks in his final examinations in certain subjects at the end of the school year.

Bill felt it prudent to back up these conditional offers at British universities with some U. S. applications. Aspiration coupled with anxiety compounded by uncertainty drove Bill to apply to twelve colleges at an aggregate cost of about \$500. For this outlay he netted one acceptance from a university at which he chose not to enroll. Eventually he did enroll at his state university which had not been included among his original set of application targets. Bill's case is exceptional in my experience in that he became involved with both a single and

a multiple application system. Cases like Bill's experience with U. S. applications, however, occur regularly in the U. S. These are the multiple applicants that clog the system.

The multiple application system conditions students to make shallow commitments and to do superficial planning. Bill's case illustrates this phenomenon. Students would like to commit themselves to enroll in a particular college. They quite rationally dampen their impulse to commit themselves to a particular outcome, however, because of its uncertainty. Some even adopt the practical mode of applying to a range of colleges after the most casual review of the possibilities. They deliberately postpone their serious research until they discover which of the colleges to which they've applied will accept them. One wonders if the lessons learned about limiting commitment during the college search are related to subsequent problems many adults have with commitment to principles, vocations, and families - sinews that are believed to hold society together.

Finally, and most critically, the multiple application system encourages students to pretend to all the colleges that each is their first choice. Prior to the age of application to college, most moral influences in the lives of the young have honored honesty. Now suddenly the ground shifts and it becomes smarter to pretend. This real-life lesson can't help but de-construct what attainment of character the seventeen-year-old has heretofore constructed. Perhaps this common experience of so many of our future leaders at age seventeen contributes to their later tolerance of or propensity for fraud in the corporate world, in politics, in government. The instrumental value of pretense has been taught by the ill-conceived college application structure through which the best and the brightest of our young people must pass.

It is not difficult to understand how the tradition of multiple applications

arose. In the nineteenth century private higher education served an affluent elite who were intent on entering one of the learned professions: law, medicine, theology, engineering, or some branch of scholarship in science or the humanities. The few universities and colleges of that time served local constituencies. They readily accepted students recommended by the headmaster of nearby independent preparatory schools whose curricula were classical. This "old-boy" network produced a steady supply of scholars for higher education. An aspiring student did not have to apply to more than one college. In fact, he may not even have had to apply at all. It was simply understood that his father and the headmaster would consult and arrange his enrollment with the president of the most conveniently located college.

The rise of the public school and the public universities along with changes in the curriculum introduced complexities for the transition. The elite universities continued to expect a traditional, classical preparatory education which meant that they continued primarily to serve members of an upper class prepared at private schools. The public universities, having legislative mandates to serve the broader segment of the population being prepared in the more general curricula of public schools, adjusted their requirements accordingly. So did the many private, usually denominationally supported colleges that sprang up as the frontier moved westward during the century. A hierarchy of status among the colleges and universities developed. The Ivy League, the "Little Ivies", Stanford and a few other colleges acquired large enough endowments to support the development of superior facilities, libraries and faculties and took the lead. These colleges and universities acquired national stature. Local patterns of college attendance for the upwardly mobile began to break down.

It was in this period in the early 20th century that the original College

Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) was established as a cooperative venture of the elite universities. Preparatory school students and some of the better public school students began to apply to universities outside their region. In turn the universities had to evaluate the preparation of students from schools they didn't know. Initially the response was for each university to administer its own entrance examinations. Logically, a central examination system devised by representatives of these universities having similar standards, simplified the application process for the schools, the candidates and the universities. A dozen or so universities formed a membership organization, The College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB), to administer annual university examinations. It would be highly appropriate if the College Board, having succeeded magnificently with a cooperative solution to the problem of multiple university entrance examinations at the beginning of the century, would plan a cooperative solution now to the problem of proliferating multiple applications. Today the College Board membership has expanded to include 1,200 colleges and universities (more than one third of the total number and all of the most prestigious ones) and 1,200 secondary schools. Why this representative body has not produced a modern university admissions system for America is a mystery worth investigating. Certainly it is not for lack of funds for research and development. The 1986-87 Annual Report of the College Board reported a Current Fund Balance of \$35 million and states that "The operating results of 1986-87 caused the Board's Current Fund balance to end the year at the level of 23.4 percent of expenses."

Perhaps one reason is that independent schools and colleges in the U. S. are fiercely committed to the principle of institutional autonomy. Freedom, Democracy and Local Control of Public Education are ideas so enshrined in the American educator's psyche that the thought of some central agency mandating rational procedures for the college admissions process seems somehow unpatriotic.

Private education at all levels trumpets its freedom from governmental, or other bureaucratic, control. They suggest that this freedom more than any other factor insures the supposed superiority of private education over other kinds.

In such a milieu each college and university has devised its own admissions procedures, printed its own forms, and insisted that applicants provide the information requested upon them as though this were the only college application the candidate was completing. There are certain similarities in the application forms. This is because colleges use the application process to advance the public's image of its exclusivity. The more difficult it is to gain admission, the more attractive seems that goal. One bewildered candidate I know actually blurted out his frustration in this phrase. "I wouldn't want to go to a college that would admit me!" Colleges of moderate selectivity tend to mimic the selective procedures of the most selective colleges even though that involves collecting more recommendations and more information than they really need to discriminate effectively among candidates in their applicant pools.

There has been one noteworthy attempt by about one hundred selective colleges - the group includes such colleges as Williams, Wesleyan and Amherst - to agree on a uniform application form. The form can be completed by the applicant, copied by the school and directed to the co-operating colleges designated by the candidate. Sensible as this seems in theory, the Common Application idea has not proven in practice to be the solution its advocates had hoped. There are several reasons why students, school counselors, and colleges feel ambiguous about using the Common Application. One major weakness is that some of the most selective universities such as Stanford or Harvard do not accept the Common Application form. Another is the belief that although a college will accept a Common Application form, it would prefer candidates who fill out its own idiosyn-

cratic form. This seems to convey a more exclusive interest on the part of the student. The signal a Common Application sends to the receiving college is: "you're just one among many colleges to which I'm broadcasting my applications." That is, of course what is really happening - Common Application form or not - but colleges like to protect their fantasies of having the exclusive interest of every applicant. They take comfort in an idiosyncratic form. Ironically, too, the Common Application exacerbates the problem of multiple applications. Many students are induced by the ease of duplication to add a few extra colleges to be sent copies just to be safe. The only check on this easy broadcast procedure is the requirement that an application fee be sent with each copy.

The most convincing explanation of why college admissions procedures remain so uncoordinated is to be found by examining the complex array of interests at stake in the transition of students from school to college. In the absence of any central authority, voluntary membership organizations of schools and colleges have developed piecemeal approaches to meet particular educational needs. The College Entrance Examination Board is one such agency. In the late forties it helped to create Educational Testing Service of Princeton, N. J. for the purpose of developing tests for the use of admissions officers in selecting candidates. Those tests, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the Achievement Tests (ACH) and the Advanced Placement Tests (AP) are either required, recommended or used by most selective colleges in the United States for purposes of admission, placement or the granting of college credit. So profitable is the sale of mass testing services to students that The College Board and its test development subcontractor, Educational Testing Service, have become rich and powerful influences upon the admissions field. In 1986-87 The College Board had revenues from test sales of \$124.9 million. Although its major client is The College Board, ETS has its own autonomy. And although The College Board is technically responsible to

its member colleges and secondary schools, the staffs of these two powerful, prestigious, and wealthy organizations always support policies that tighten their dominance and reinforce their job security. Reformers they are not.

I do not accuse the College Board of obfuscation in the abstract. In 1963, I was a member of the advisory board for the College Admissions Center. This was a clearinghouse operation conducted by the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC). It worked by collecting credentials of students who had been denied places at colleges to which they had originally applied. Admissions officers of colleges with openings in the summer would review these credentials and make offers to those whom they found qualified for their institutions. The experience of this "emergency" provision was surprisingly satisfactory. It did not take much imagination to see how this clearinghouse operation could be transmuted into a central application service by devising a credential input form which would rank order the students' college preferences. The form could then be duplicated and sent to colleges within the regular application calendar and the students, their schools and colleges themselves would be spared unnecessary cost of multiple applications. As a member of the advisory board of the College Admissions Center, I drafted a proposal to proceed with the planning of such a service. Two models, The Intern Matching Plan, and the incipient British UCCA plan guided the drafting of that proposal. The Intern Matching Plan is still used successfully to match medical school graduates with hospital intern openings at the highest possible level of satisfaction considering the preferences of both interns and hospitals. In the fall of 1963 the advisory board met in Toledo, Ohio following the annual national convention of the Association of College Admissions Counselors. There was some skepticism from colleagues, but I was heartened by what I felt was a sympathetic hearing from some experienced admissions directors. Just before the advisory board put the issue to a vote,

one of its members, Dr. Richard Pearson, a distinguished staff member of The College Board, eloquently expressed his doubts and by implication revealed the preference of The Board which was that NACAC should not undertake such an ambitious admissions reform. The proposal was defeated. Had the vote been otherwise in Toledo on that October day in 1963, U. S. students might today be finding it as easy to find a place in college as do their British and Irish counterparts. I blame the Board for that retreat from challenge. But the College Board is not the only player in the admissions arena.

In the late 1950's another national testing agency arose to challenge the profitable admissions testing monopoly toward which the College Board was driving. The American College Testing Program (ACT) successfully induced the public universities of a number of states outside the Northeast to develop state testing programs using tests developed at the University of Iowa. This growth was in part a reaction of public land grant universities against the perceived elitism of the northeastern higher educational establishment whose values at that time dominated the policies of The College Board. But ACT also grew because it was developing highly useful information collecting and research services.

ACT rapidly grew to rival CEEB in numbers of students tested. CEEB and ETS were stimulated to improve their own services. ACT's growth was served by the steady rise in the percent of students attending public universities. The nation's community colleges expanded rapidly in the sixties to accommodate the demand for lower cost local opportunities for young men who sought the deferment from the draft that college enrollment provided. Many of the two-year colleges required applicants to take the ACT test battery.

Federal legislation supporting students in higher education has introduced another powerful influence on university admissions operations. The requirement

that there be a "needs-test" to establish eligibility for awarding money to students from federal aid programs has prompted a most promising cooperation among universities. Both the College Board and the American College Testing Program have developed financial need evaluation services. These centralized services meet the requirements of the federal government that universities grant aid to students in proportion to their need. Instead of the forms being collected by the universities, the forms are sent to a central office for analysis and then reported to all of the universities specified by the student. These financial need analysis services developed because government policy dictated a needs test. Universities realized that a central agency could provide this necessary service uniformly, reliably and more cheaply than if each university calculated the financial need of its own applicants. Their cooperation in this matter has succeeded superbly.

This successful venture in centralizing a critical element of the admissions operation is most encouraging. Complex financial data covering diverse family situations is routinely collected, analyzed and reported speedily to colleges. Using this information universities make their financial aid decisions. "Why, then", you might ask, "would it not be possible to collect centrally the kind of information necessary to make admissions decisions?" It would be. As a matter of fact, both ACT and CEEB do collect more information about students' academic records, activities, vocational plans, college objectives and other desiderata at the time students register to take the tests. All that is necessary to convert these centralized testing and data collection operations into an efficient national admissions operation is consensus among The Powers in American higher education. Therein lies the difficulty. Just who takes responsibility for cooperative reforms of this magnitude?

The elite universities both private and public might take the lead in this kind of cooperation. Yet it is the elite universities who have the inflated budgets to squander on inefficient admissions operations. They are succeeding in their efforts to fill their classes with good enough students; they feel no need to change.

The College Board itself, might exert some leadership in this reform. The Board, however, historically has been loath to move in directions disruptive to the admissions traditions of the elite universities who persist as the most influential members of its constituency. Both College Board and ETS are heavily dependent upon revenue from admissions tests. Under present conditions fostering admissions anxieties, students are conditioned to repeated testings. ETS and ACT both exact an extra fee to transmit score reports to additional universities. The more multi-applications, the more revenue for the testing agencies. There are, after all, only a finite number of college-bound students each year. If the admissions procedures are structured so that more of them apply to more colleges, the demographic ceiling on test sales and re-sales is lifted.

The federal government is unlikely to take the kind of role in fostering admissions reform that it did in encouraging the central processing of financial aid applications. There is no U. S. tradition of direct government authority over universities in such policy details. On the contrary, there is strong opposition to any government initiative that might coerce. Parents of college bound students are the most logical constituency to demand reform. But this group changes every year and leaves the colleges at liberty to fleece another innocent flock. The most likely scenario is that multiple applications will proliferate until even the elite universities recognize the absurdity of it all. At that point, perhaps, more thoughtful educators will have the chance to develop

an admissions system that works for students rather than against them.

There is one ray of hope in this dismal competitive admissions scene. School counselors, increasingly aware of the pernicious effects of the worsening system, are becoming vocal about its evils. Traditionally in the educational hierarchy, school counselors have been dominated by college admissions officers who, after all, are in charge of dispensing - or withholding - the boons of admission. Such was the prestige of flagship universities that petitioners for entrance and their agents (the school guidance counselors) dared not publicly criticize the system for fear of reprisal. Another factor in the docility of counselors in accepting an unsatisfactory system is that they are frequently retained as paid test administrators by the Educational Testing Service. On the take from ETS, they have tended to buy into the policies and attitudes which prevail at Princeton (the home office of ETS). Now, however, better trained and more independent counselors are openly critical of the admissions conventions which elite university tradition and test agency collusion have thoughtlessly perpetuated. This fall (1988) a proposal to study the development of a single application system will be on the agenda of the governing Assembly of the National Association of College Admissions Counselors. The decision the Assembly of NACAC faces is essentially the same decision faced by the Advisory Board of the erstwhile NACAC -sponsored College Admissions Center twenty five years ago. In 1963 the admissions profession decided against developing a more rational system of matching college aspirants with colleges. In the intervening years, the admissions mess has steadily worsened. As war is too important to be left to the generals, the public interest in effective admissions procedures is too great to be trusted to functionaries who have only a narrow, institutional view of their duties. School counselors are organizing for the long haul to insist that the students' needs for more practical application arrangements be,

at last in the United States, better served.

Social anthropologists note that nearly every society has a rite of passage from childhood into adulthood. Typical of American Indian cultures is an ordeal. In some tribes it is a lonely quest in the wilderness for a vision which establishes for its receiver his or her relationship to society, nature and the Controlling Forces of life. For the Sioux it is the self-torturous sun dance in which young men publicly prove their courage. Candidates for adulthood emerge from such trials confident that they have met the standard by which adults are valued. By contrast the ordeal of selective college admissions leaves its victims psychologically battered and morally corrupted. It is the wrong rite for the most promising of our youth. They deserve better.